

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 ARA-06 IO-13 AID-05
PC-01 /100 W
-----010002Z 007292 /14

R 311532Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5765
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, AO
SUBJ: STATUS OF UNITA INSIDE ANGOLA

SUMMARY: AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST PORTRAYS UNITA AS WELL ARMED, DISCIPLINED, BRUTALLY EFFECTIVE AND IN CONTROL OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SOUTH OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD IN ANGOLA. THE JOURNALIST, WHO SPENT SIX MONTHS WITH UNITA IN ANGOLA, SEES LITTLE CHANCE OF COMBINED MPLA/CUBAN FORCES ELIMINATING UNITA, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND DOES NOT BELIEVE UNITA IS STRONG ENOUGH TO WIN A MILITARY VICTORY OVER THE MPLA. CHANCES FOR A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN UNITA, MPLA, AND FNLA APPEAR TO BE NIL. SWAPO AND UNITA ARE BITTER ENEMIES. UNITA APPARENTLY IS RECEIVING LITTLE IF ANY SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE ANGOLA. END SUMMARY.

1. AMERICAN JOURNALIST MAY 30 GAVE EMBOFF A RUNDOWN ON HIS
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IMPRESSIONS OF THE MILITARY SITUATION WITHIN ANGOLA. JOURNALIST ARRIVED IN LUSAKA MAY 29 AFTER SPENDING BETTER THAN SIX MONTHS WITH UNITA INSIDE ANGOLA. FOLLOWING IS THE JOURNALIST'S ASSESSMENT.

2. UNITA CONTROLS THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE AREA SOUTH OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD. ALL BRIDGES LINKING THE NORTH WITH THE SOUTH HAVE BEEN CUT. FOUR ENGINE, PROP DRIVEN PLANES OF RUSSIAN MAKE ARE

USED AS THE ONLY MEANS OF TRANSPORTING MATERIAL AND MEN BY THE
MPLA TO AND FROM THE LARGER CITIES IN THE SOUTH. CUBANS HAVE PULLED
OUT OF THE SOUTHERN PART OF ANGOLA EXCEPT FOR THE MAJOR CITIES.
UNITA HAS MOVED 700 MEN INTO MALENJE PROVINCE--A TRADITIONAL MPLA
STRONGHOLD. ALL MAJOR BRIDGES ON THE BENGUELA RAILROAD HAVE BEEN
BLOWN AND SECTIONS OF TRACK REMOVED AND PARTS OF IT MINED.
SIMILARLY, THE BRIDGES ON THE SOUTHERN RAILROAD FROM SERPO PINTO
TO THE SEA AT MOCAMODES HAVE BEEN BLOWN, MAKING IT UNUSEABLE.
MPLA FORCES RARELY MOVE OUT OF THE CITIES ON PATROL; WHEN THEY DO
THEY ARE SUBJECT TO UNITA AMBUSHES. UNITA FORCES HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY
DESTROYED THE SMALLER TOWNS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH. AFTER THE
CAPTURE OF A TOWN, MPLA TROOPS AND ANY CIVILIANS REMAINING ARE
KILLED. UNITA WARNS ITS SUPPORTERS IN ADVANCE OF AN ATTACK
THAT ANYONE REMAINING IN THE TOWN WILL BE CONSIDERED AN MPLA
SYMPATHIZER AND WILL BE KILLED. ALL BUILDINGS IN CAPTURED TOWNS
AND VILLAGES ARE RAZED TO THE GROUND. ANY CUBANS TAKEN PRISONER
ARE EXECUTED. (IN HIS MONTHS IN ANGOLA, THE JOURNALIST NEVER
SAW A CUBAN; UNITA ESTIMATES ONE THOUSAND CUBANS HAVE BEEN
KILLED SINCE THEY ARRIVED IN ANGOLA.)

3. THE OVAMBUNDU IN THE SOUTH ARE LOYAL TO UNITA AND SAVIMBI
AND WILLINGLY PROVIDE RECRUITS AND FOOD FOR THE UNITA FORCES.
SAVIMBI ALSO COMMANDS SUPPORT FROM 10 OR 12 SMALLER SOUTHERN
TRIBES. UNITA IS A BOURGOISE, ETHNICALLY BASED MOVEMENT DEVOID
OF IDEOLOGY. THE STRUCTURE OF UNITA STARTS AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL
WHERE THERE ARE SMALL UNITA CELLS, OFTEN INCLUDING LOCAL CHIEFTANS.
THE NEXT LEVEL IS A CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO WHICH THE VILLAGE CELLS
SEND REPRESENTATIVES. THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IS LARGE AND CUMBER-
SOME. AT THE SUMMIT OF UNITA IS THE POLITICAL BUREAU. IN THEORY
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COMMUNICATION IS BOTH FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM AND BOTTOM TO THE
TOP. SAVIMBI IS THE PIVOTAL FIGURE OF UNITA; IF HE SHOULD BE
KILLED, UNITA COULD DIE. THERE IS NO REPLACEMENT WHO COMMANDS THE
SAME LOYALTY. UNITA FORCES ARE WELL ARMED WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF
SMALL ARMS (RUSSIAN, BELGIAN, PORTUGUESE, AMERICAN). THEIR
HEAVIEST WEAPON IS A 75 MILIMETER RECOLESS RIFLE. THERE ARE NO
SIGNS OF SOUTH AFRICAN EQUIPMENT OR SUPPORT OTHER THAN RAINCOATS
AND CANTEENS LEFT OVER FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN INTERVENTION IN
1975. THE JOURNALIST IS CONVINCED THAT HE WOULD HAVE LEARNED OF
SOUTH AFRICAN COOPERATION HAD IT EXISTED. SAVIMBI, HE SAID, FULLY
UNDERSTANDS THE DANGER OF SOUTH AFRICAN COLLABORATION. THE
JOURNALIST SAID HE SAW NO EVIDENCE OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT FOR UNITA
FROM ANY SOURCE. COMMUNICATIONS ARE ASSURED BY RUNNER AND HAND
OPERATED RADIOS OF BRITISH MAKE. FOOD SUPPLIES ARE PLENTIFUL
EXCEPT IN THE THINLY POPULATED REGION BORDERING ON ZAMBIA.
MEDICINES ARE RARE OR NONEXISTENT. PAYMENT FOR FOOD AND OTHER
SUPPLIES IN THE UNITA-CONTROLLED AREA IS MADE IN ESCUCOS;
WHENEVER THE NEW ANGOLAN CURRENCY FALLS INTO UNITA HANDS IT IS
WITHDRAWN FROM CIRCULATION. AT A LATER DATE UNITA PLANS TO DROP

IT BACK INTO CIRCULATION IN THE HOPE OF GENERATING INFLATION.

4. THERE IS ALMOST NO PROSPECT OF A UNITA RECONCILIATION WITH MPLA AND RELATIONS WITH THE FNL AND SWAPO ARE EXTREMELY POOR. TOO MUCH BLOOD HAS BEEN SHED ON BOTH SIDES FOR THE MPLA AND UNITA TO COME TOGETHER ON A PEACEFUL BASIS. THE ONLY HOPE FOR A SETTLEMENT IS ARMED VICTORY BY ONE OR THE OTHER. UNITA REGARDS THE FNL AS AN ENEMY AND SHOWS NO INTEREST IN COLLABORATING WITH THAT MOVEMENT. THE FNL FOUGHT BITTERLY DURING THE BRIEF COALITION ARRANGEMENT IN 1975 AND WOULD DO SO AGAIN IF THEY CAME INTO CONTACT. SWAPO AND UNITA ARE ON A SHOOT FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER FOOTING; FULL SCALE WAR EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO GUERRILLA GROUPS. UNITA IS TRYING TO ESTABLISH CLOSER LIAISON WITH FLEC. IT IS COUNTING ON ITS SECRETARY GENERAL, WHO HAS CLOSE CONTACT WITH FLEC, TO PULL THIS OFF.

5. UNITA HAD MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THE EX-KATANGAN GENDARMES
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ATTACK INTO SHABA. IT WAS GLAD TO GET THEM OUT OF ANGOLA ON THE ONE HAND, BUT CONCERNED ABOUT THE EFFECT ON MOBUTU'S GOVERNMENT. ITS PRIMARY FEELING, HOWEVER, WAS GOOD RIDDANCE.

6. THE JOURNALIST ESTIMATES THAT UNITA CAN HOLD ON INDEFINITELY IN THE SOUTH BUT DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT IT HAS THE CAPABILITY OF GAINING AN ARMED VICTORY OVER COMBINED UNITA-CUBAN FORCES. HE FORESEES A BLOODY STANDOFF GOING ON FOR YEARS. LOW

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Message Attributes

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Decapton Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decapton Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2414224
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STATUS OF UNITA INSIDE ANGOLA SUMMARY: AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST PORTRAYS UNITA AS WELL ARMED, DISCIPLINED, BRUTALLY EFFECTIVE AND IN CONTROL OF
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, MPOL, AO, UNITA, SWAPO, FNLA, MPLA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9fcd428c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009